

# SUMMARY OF AAA CONSERVATION PROGRESS IN MONTANA

*A progress report by the Montana State  
Agricultural Adjustment Agency Committee  
on the more widely used soil building  
and conserving practices under the AAA  
Program for the period from 1938 to 1945.*

U. S. Dept. of Agriculture - Agricultural Adjustment Agency - Aug. 1945

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Through the attached charts the Montana State AAA Committee hopes to give you a general idea of the progress that is being made toward maintaining and improving the State's soil and water resources under the Government-farmer partnership of the Agricultural Conservation Program.

Charts, figures or the printed word cannot adequately convey what has been accomplished as a result of the ACP Program's assistance to farmers in performing needed conservation practices. Our State's war food production record is evidence of returns on the investment of the Nation in ACP practices in Montana. The value of this work cannot be computed in ordinary terms since the future of the nation depends so directly upon what happens to its soil.

The charts show rather graphically, we feel, the progress that has been made under the ACP Program toward improving and maintaining the soil resources in our State. We have included only a few of the more important practices with a brief explanation of each chart. Other soil building and conserving practices which are important to Montana include, noxious weed control, contouring and reseeding and improving of pastures. The charts illustrate the tremendous expansion of farmer-interest in soil conservation. There has been a steady growth in this interest with a surprising upsurge during the past two years. As a result of this expansion, farmers and ranchers would like to have ACP assistance on many more practices than our share of the available funds will permit.

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We are making every effort to use the ACP funds to obtain maximum conservation returns to the Nation in the way that is fairest to all cooperating farmers and ranchers. We are making reductions in the amount of assistance on practices in order to spread the influence of the available funds as far as possible and to shift emphasis to practices which are badly needed but less generally accepted and used. Our farmer-committeemen in the counties are now faced with a very difficult job of encouraging maximum conservation while setting definite limits on payments that may be earned. This is necessary in order to stay within the allocation of funds to the county. Most counties have requests for conservation assistance considerably in excess of their funds.

The desire of many farmers and ranchers to utilize more extensively the assistance of the AAA Program in carrying out needed conservation on their land is due in part to the realization that the heavy production effort during the war has taken its toll of our soil resources. Farmers are anxious to repay to the soil the inevitable price of sustained high production. Perhaps the contrast between this interest in conserving our soil and what happened to our soil resources during and after World War I offers the most striking illustration of the progress that this Nation has made toward taking proper care of the basic resource upon which its future strength and greatness depend.

AAA has continued to assist farmers to adjust their production in line with our national needs. It has performed as the legislation intended that it should -- adjusting upward or downward. No special commodity payments or parity payments are being made except for the acreage payment for planting flaxseed which is provided by a special appropriation. During the war, the emphasis of the conservation program has been shifted from "long range" conservation to practices which will secure more immediate increases in production.

A brief explanation of each chart follows. The first chart is a summary for the thirteen States of the Western Region and has been included to give you a general idea of the program in the Region of which Montana is a part. All the other charts pertain to Montana alone. Estimates for 1945 particularly as to the volume of practices to be performed are preliminary. It is thought that the total for all practices is close but because of weather, or changes in the availability of equipment, supplies and labor operators may do considerable shifting between practices.

No. 1. Estimated gross payments for conservation practices performed in the Western Region. This shows a steady growth in the use of the program from 1938 when practice payments totalled \$16,880,000 to 1944 with a preliminary total of \$55,287,000. The estimate for 1945 is about \$2,500,000 less than the 1944 total because the regional allocation was exceeded in 1944 whereas more effective controls are being used in 1945 which will assure operating within the allocation. It is estimated that farmers in the Western Region would perform practices to the extent of \$84,000,000 if sufficient AAA funds were available to assist them.

This steady growth shows an increasing awareness of the importance of soil and water conservation and reflects the steady development of a program



suited to the needs of the West. In the administration of the program farmer and rancher committeemen are able to adjust to local conditions keeping at all times within the rather broad outlines of policy and specifications developed nationally and for the Region. The increase in participation is even more startling when consideration is given to the shortage of manpower, equipment and materials because of the war.

No. 2. Estimated gross payments for conservation practices show a general upward trend from 1938 to 1944 with the exception of 1942 the first year when the full impact of the war with its shortages of manpower, equipment and materials hit. The estimate for 1945 is below 1944 only because of the shortage of funds. Prior to 1943 individual farm allowances were established by formula based on the acres of cropland, orchard and grazing land in the unit. In 1943 a limited adjustment between farms was allowed and in 1944 and 1945 farm allowances established by county committeemen were based on the comparative need for conservation practices rather than on acreages of land. This method greatly increases the applicability of the program to individual farms and ranches. In 1945 State and county allocations were established which could not be exceeded. Practices requested in the 1945 farm plan sign-up total over 50 percent above the allocation, even though the community committeemen made every effort during the sign-up to get operators to show only essential practices for their farms. It was necessary for community and county committeemen to very carefully check the farm plans and, in order to keep farm allowances within the 1945 State and county allocation of money they could approve assistance on only a part of the practices farmers and ranchers desired to perform.

No. 3. Gross ACP and range payments include commodity payments on wheat, potatoes and general diversion payments as well as conservation practice payments, except that none of the above special payments were made in 1944 and the only commodity payment in 1945 is the special payment for the planting of flax. Total gross payments show a high in 1939 when the wheat payment was 17 cents per bushel compared with 12 cents in 1938 and 8.1 cents in 1940. Administrative expenses, State and county, have been reduced every year since 1939. This is particularly noteworthy in view of the generally rising level of wages paid and represents a greatly reduced personnel made even more difficult by a high turnover of help and the use of inexperienced help.

No. 4. The acreage of stripcropping has generally been between 2 and 3 million acres. This represents two types of farming, one is a combination of close grown crops and summer fallow in alternate strips, the other a combination of erosion resisting crops with crops that do not hold the soil well. The practice is one of the best known to prevent erosion. Since the institution of stripcropping wheat yields in the State have been greatly increased thru moisture conservation and a reduction in the amount of wheat blown or washed out. While this practice represents around 40 percent of the total program in the State there is great need for still further increases in the acreage of stripcropping.

No. 5. The volume of irrigation practices is expressed in dollar value since the practices include concrete work, land levelling, metal and concrete flumes, siphons, wooden structures, lining seepy ditches and



reservoirs, etc. and there is no common unit of measurement other than value. From 1938 to 1942 the practice consisted mainly of measuring weirs and check dams and drops. In 1943 a practice covering the reorganization of the farm irrigation system according to a comprehensive plan was added. Under this, provision was made for levelling irrigated cropland as was provision for the construction or relocation of permanent laterals, dikes and borders. Due to a shortage of dirt moving equipment there was not much participation until 1944. Even yet we have only started on what will be a tremendous job. The payment for levelling usually covers only a small proportion of the cost, actual costs to the operator often running to \$30.00 or \$40.00 per acre. Under this practice many operators have been able to improve their irrigation, generally by being able to better control their irrigation water and they have reduced the amount of water needed, at the same time reducing seepage and erosion.

No. 6. The construction of dams and reservoirs for livestock water is important on range land because it permits better utilization of grass through making dry areas available to stock, it reduces trailing of stock and most of the dams help prevent erosion. Construction dropped off in 1942 and 1943 because much dirt-moving equipment was transferred from dam construction to work on airports, munition dumps, etc. Ranchers report substantial increases in the weight of range livestock due directly to adequate distribution of water. Since the beginning of our program there have been constructed in Montana in the neighborhood of 25,000 reservoirs with a total yardage in excess of 37 million yards or 1/4 of the yardage which is in Ft. Peck dam. These reservoirs are scattered far and wide over the entire State where they benefit practically every rancher in the State.

No. 7. Wells aid, as do reservoirs, in obtaining a better use of range lands. During droughts wells are a more dependable source of water and many ranchers are using a combination of the two practices feeling that it gives greater security under the varied conditions that may be encountered. The number of wells drilled dropped off in 1942 when drillers and casing were extremely hard to get, but have since increased to a new peak in 1944.

No. 8. Originally this practice was designed to obtain natural reseeding of range grasses through deferring the grazing on up to 25 percent of the total range acreage of a ranch from the start of forage growth in the spring until after seed maturity in the fall. Under this approach 25 percent of the acreage was the most that could be shown under the practice. In 1943 the practice was changed to a range management approach whereby a smaller payment was made on all the eligible grazing land in the unit for proper utilization, and for following a management plan developed by the operator and the county committee. The main measure of compliance was the degree of utilization of the grass. In 1944 the direct payment for management was eliminated and the payment was required to be earned by supplemental range improvement practices under the management plan. Rotation or deferred grazing was often required under the management plan and no payment at all was made if there was overgrazing of the land in the ranching unit. Thousands of acres have been re-grassed and due to this Montana is now carrying the greatest number of livestock on its ranges in history. In addition to this and due to the fact that there has been much reseeding of crested wheat grass, an early spring growing grass, ranchers are today putting on the market yearling steers weighing from 100 to 200 pounds in excess of what they did years ago, before the institution of this practice.

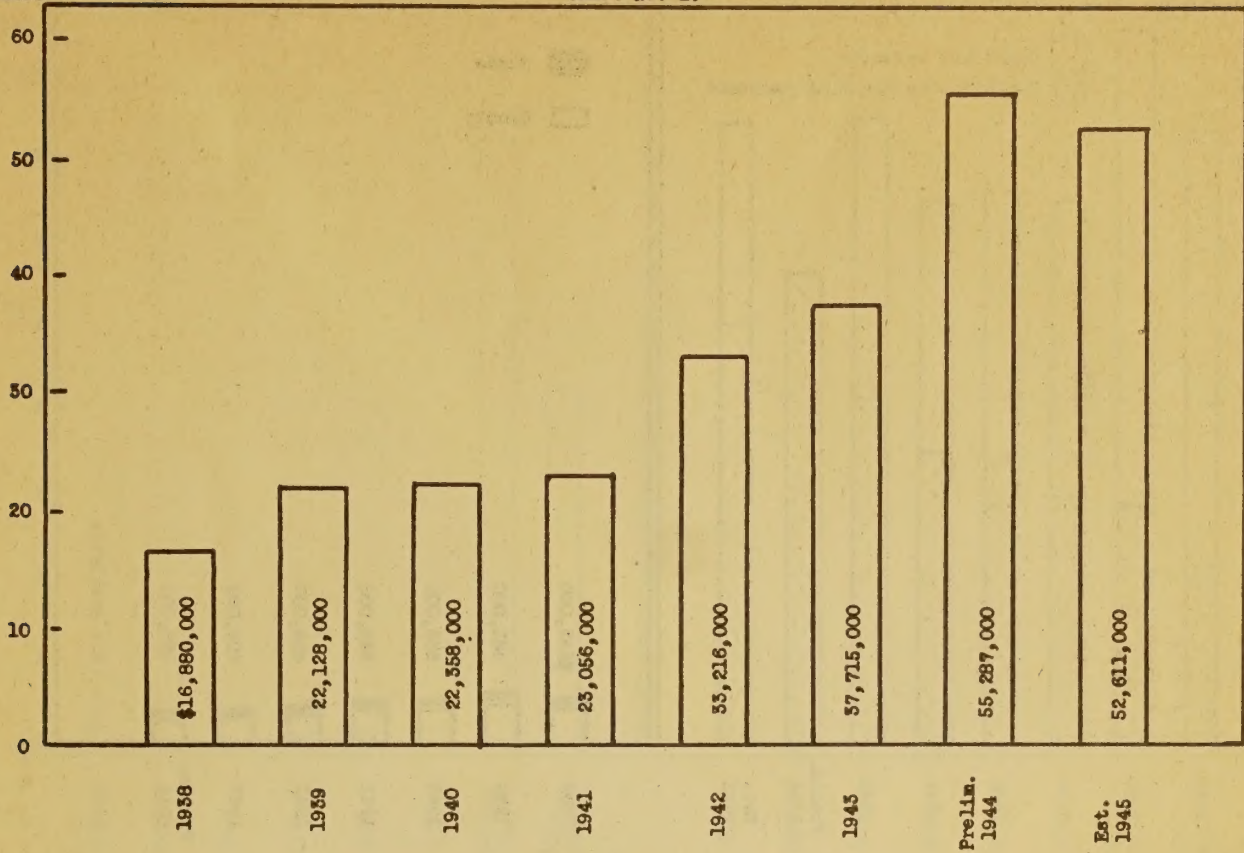


# WESTERN REGION

Estimated gross payments for conservation practices performed (incl. size-of-pmt. adj.)

Million  
Dollars

Chart No. 1.

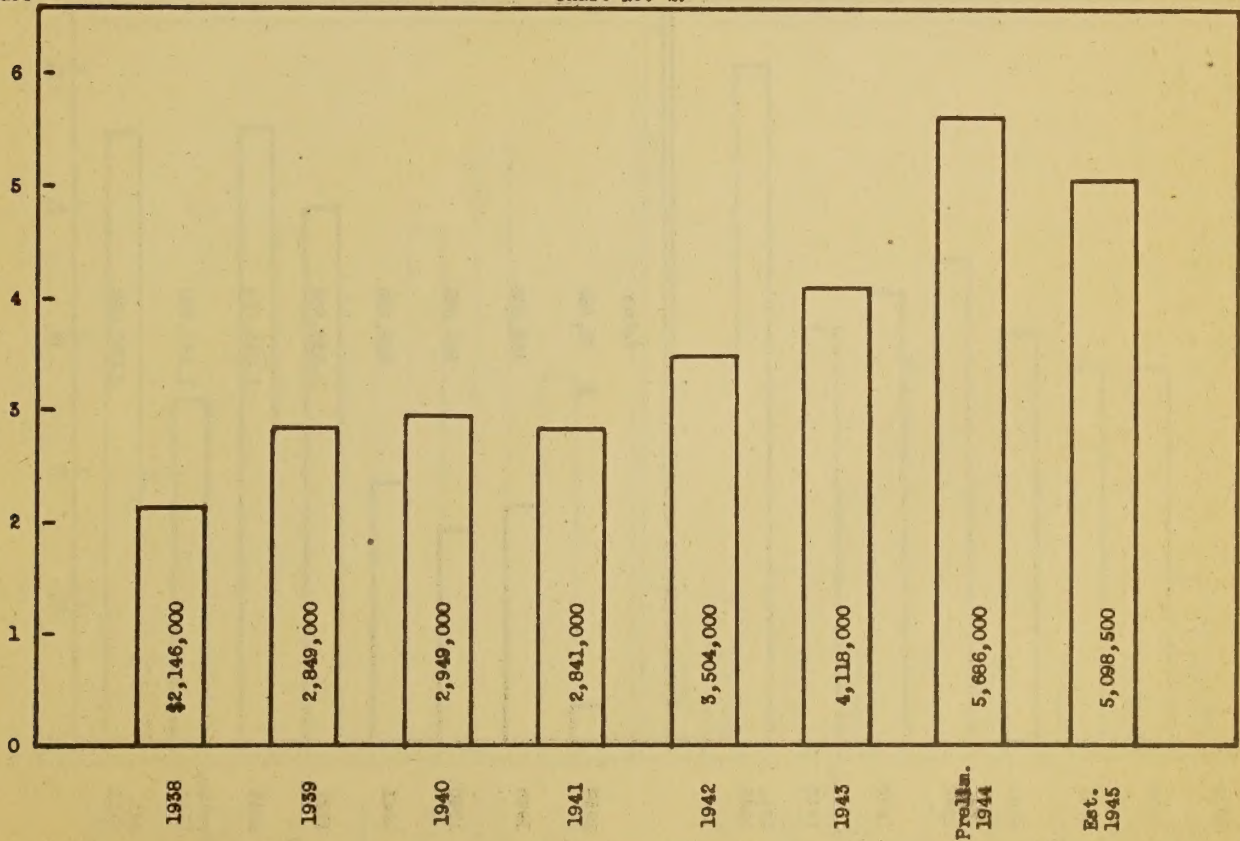


# MONTANA

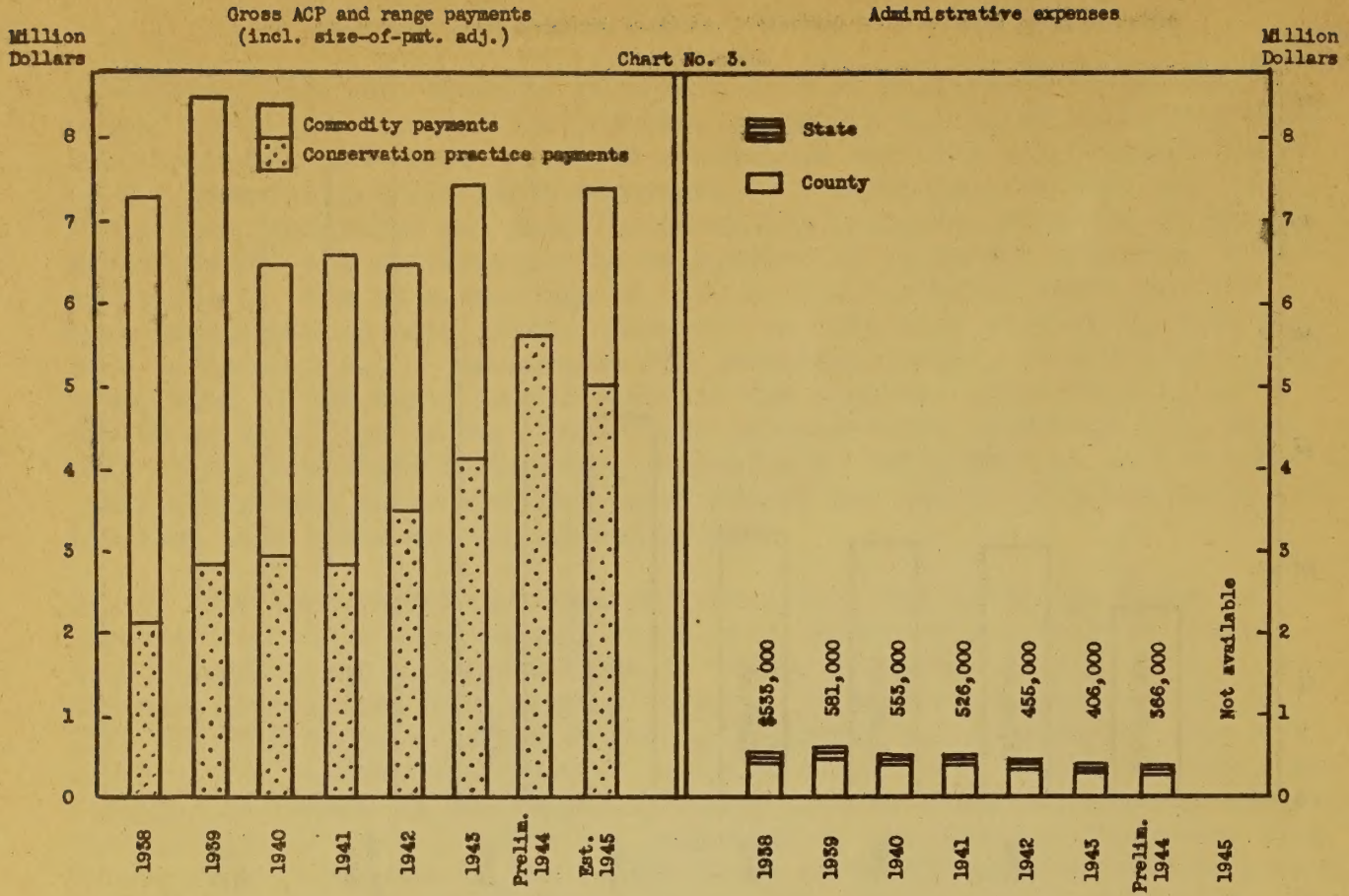
Estimated gross payments for conservation practices performed (incl. size-of-pmt. adj.)

Million  
Dollars

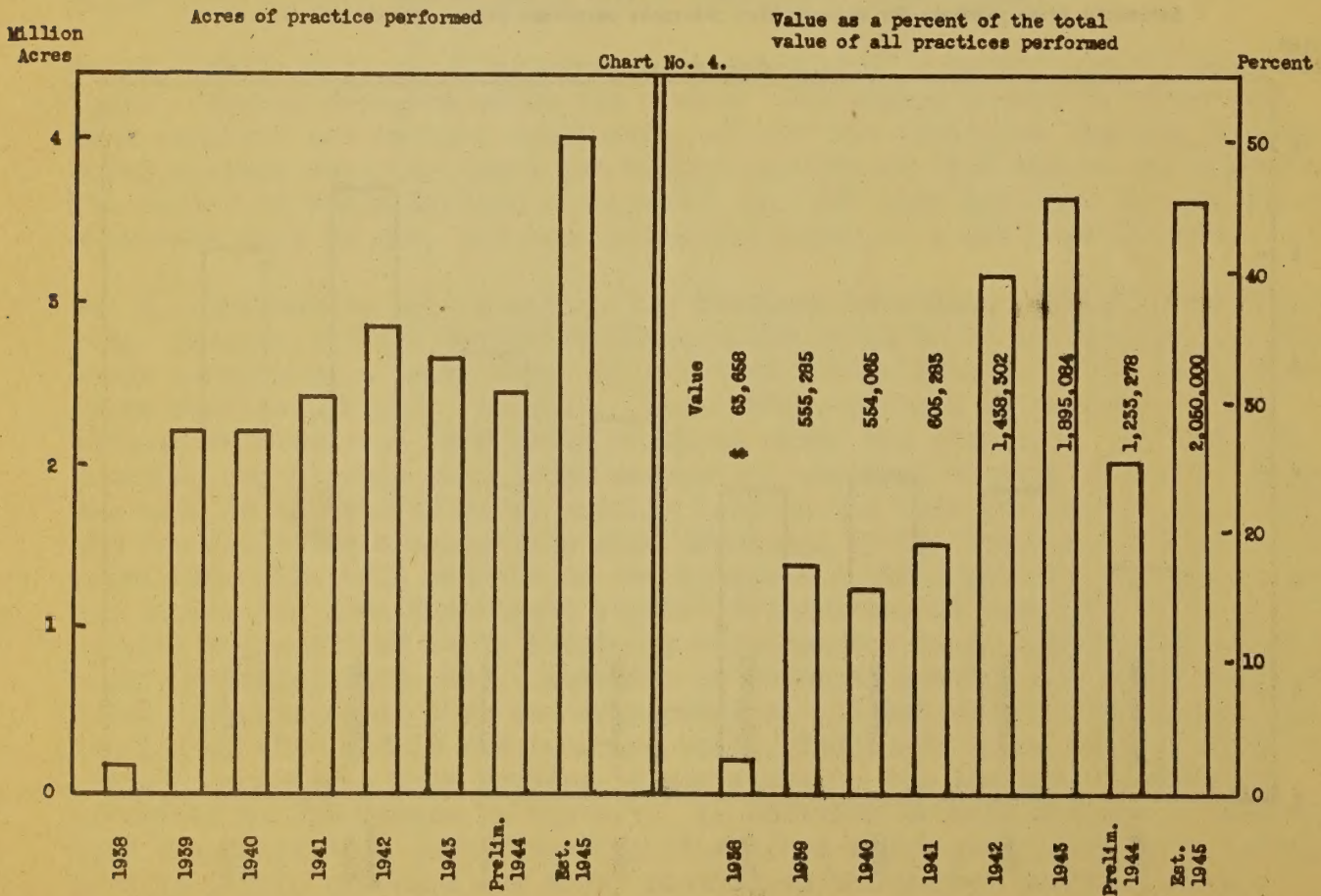
Chart No. 2.







## Stripcropping



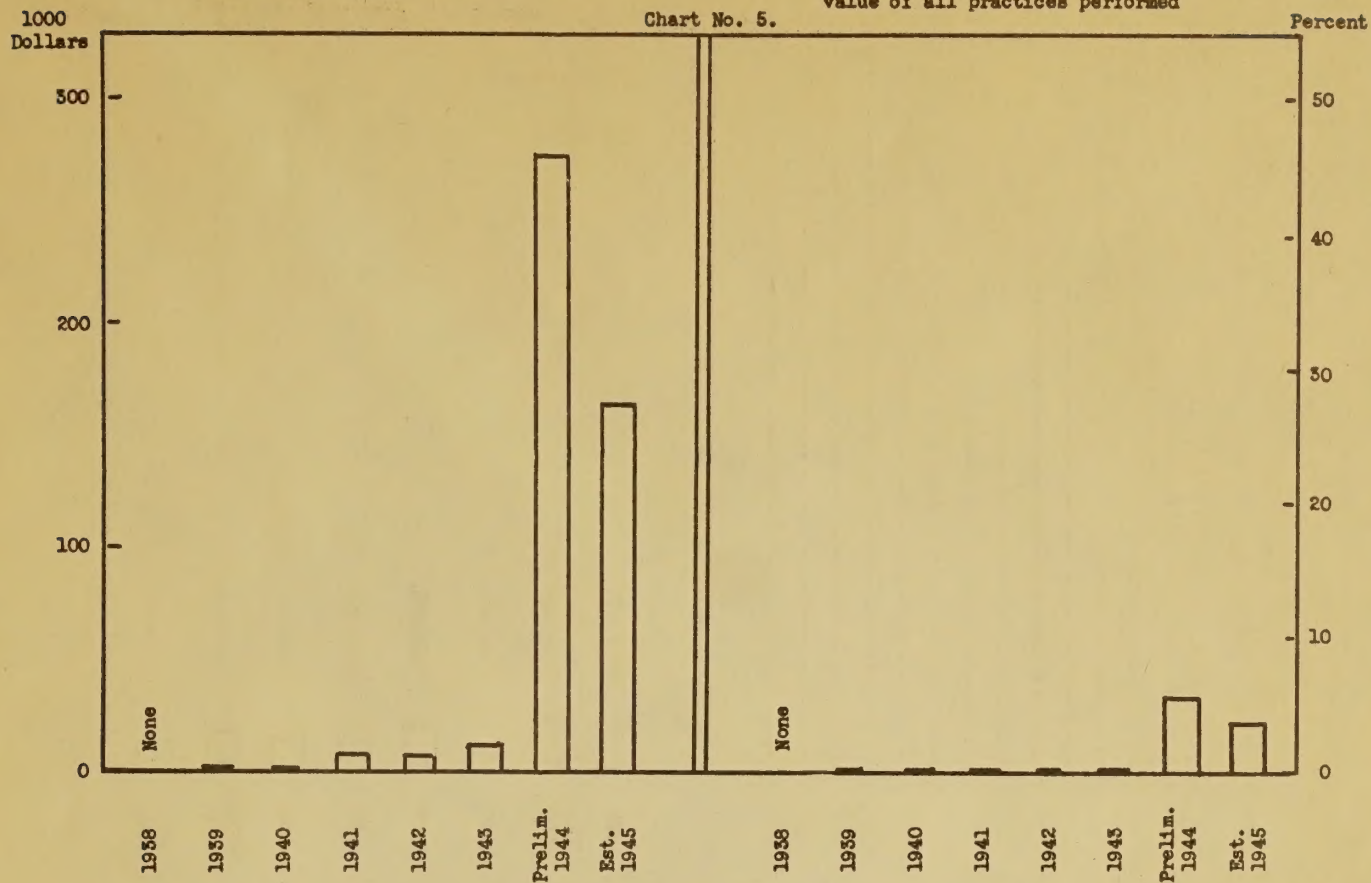


MONTANA

Irrigation practices

Value of irrigation practices performed

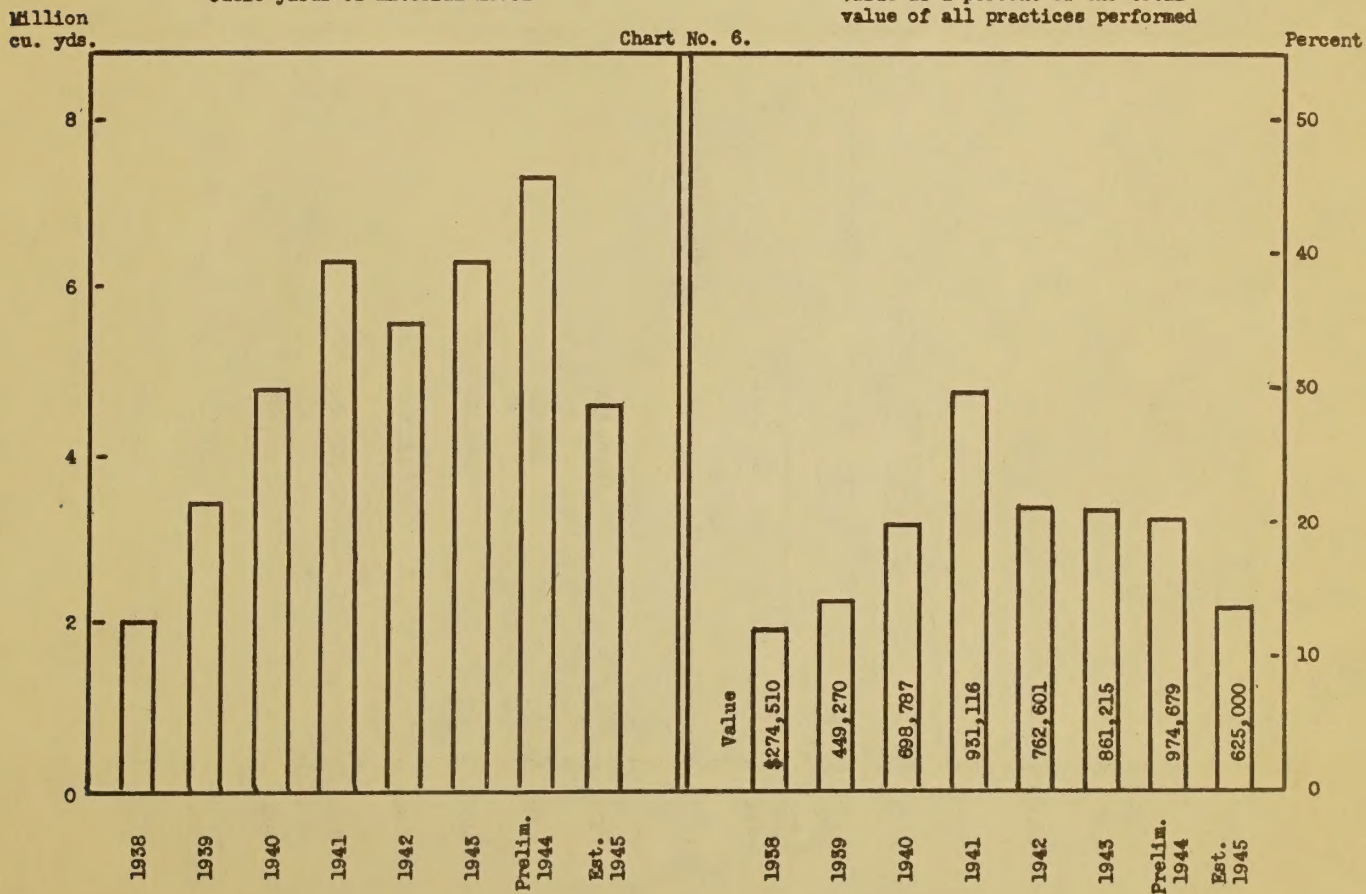
Value as a percent of the total  
value of all practices performed



Dams and reservoirs

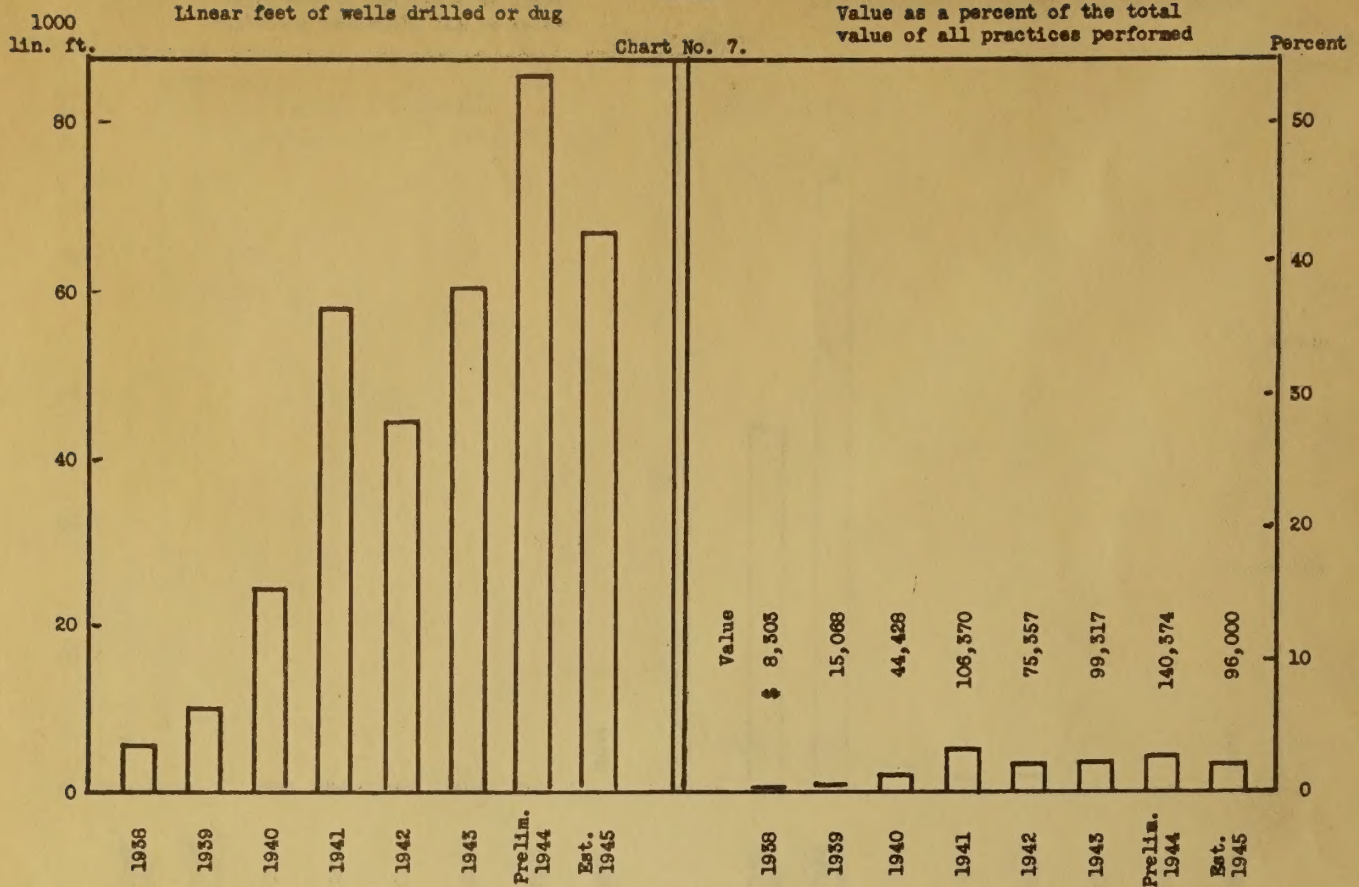
Cubic yards of material moved

Value as a percent of the total  
value of all practices performed



MONTANA

Wells



Grazing land management and reseedling by deferred grazing

